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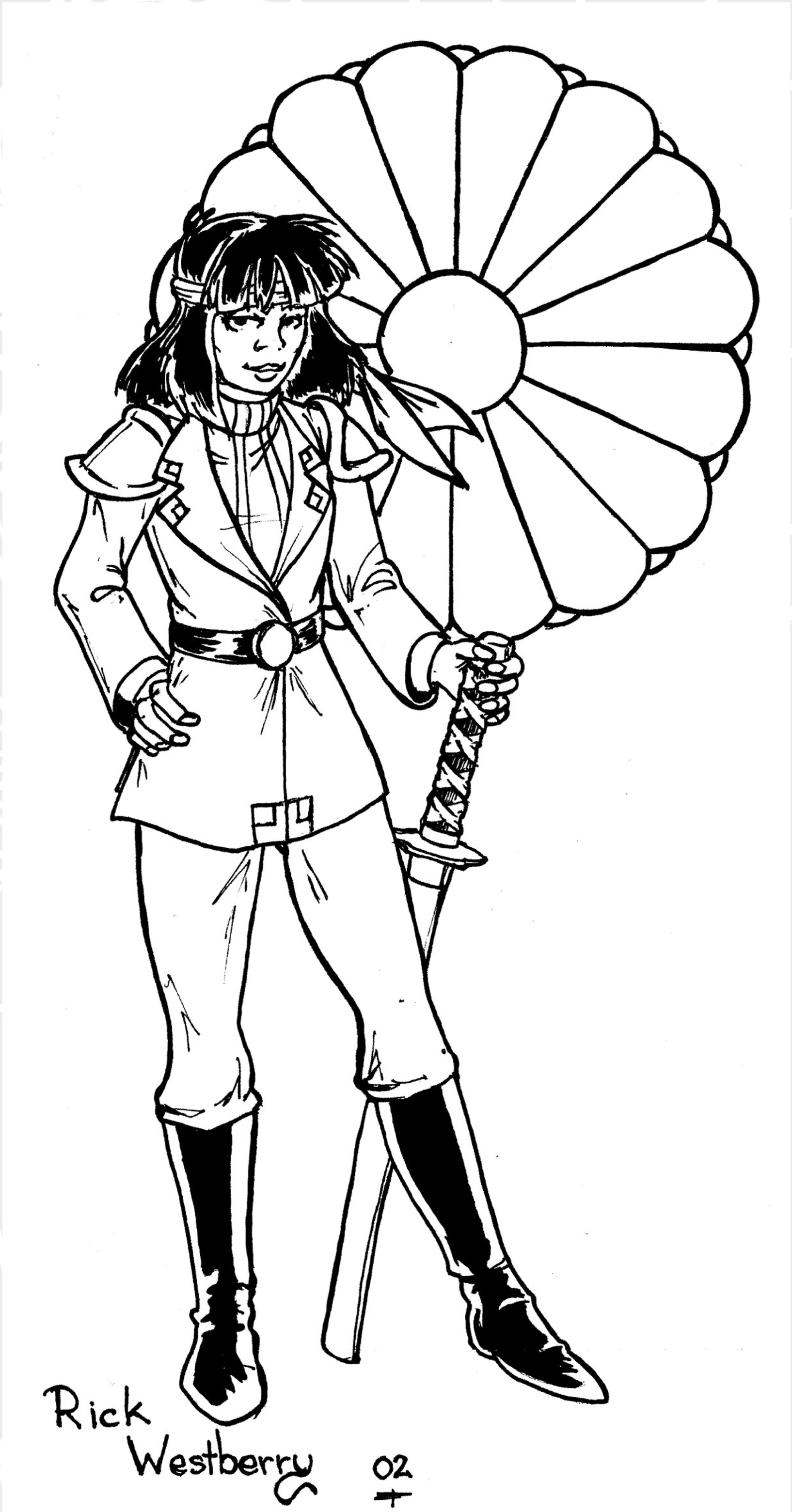
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BUREAU of MANA INVESTIGATION

ISSUE 6



VOLUME 1



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"You're an old man, and old people are useless - yes they are!"

Bureau of Mana Investigation

Chapter Six

SMUDGE - ED GARCIA
BACKCOVER -TRACY REYNOLDS
GUEST ILLO - RICK WESTBERRY


〈EXCELLENT WORK, TARLOÖM.〉
〈THANK YOU, MY LORD.〉
〈NOW, THE ONLY THING I HAVE LEFT IS TO DEAL WITH SHARRDAN.〉


〈WHERE THE HELL DID SHE GET THAT!?〉
〈I DON'T KNOW.〉


TAHEE!
〈I'M TOLD THAT YOU WENT MISSING FROM THE PALACE AGAIN.〉


〈YOUR DUTY AS SORCERER PRIMUS IS TO REMAIN HERE.〉


〈DON'T DO IT AGAIN!〉
CRACK!!

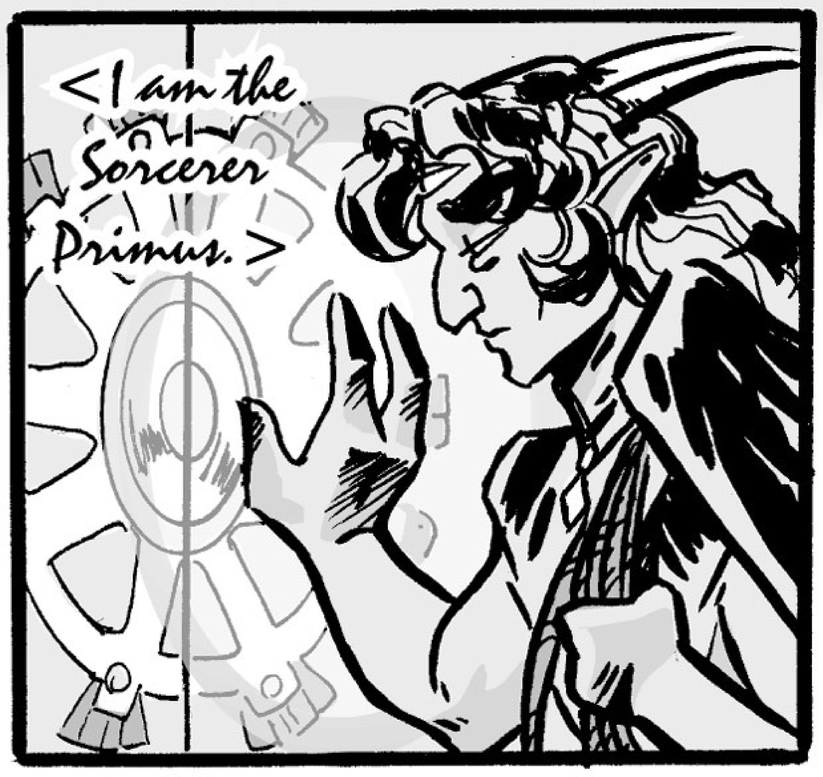

〈TARLOÖM NEEDED YOUR POWER AND YOU WEREN'T HERE!〉
〈I WILL NOT FORGIVE THIS.〉
KA-RUNCH!

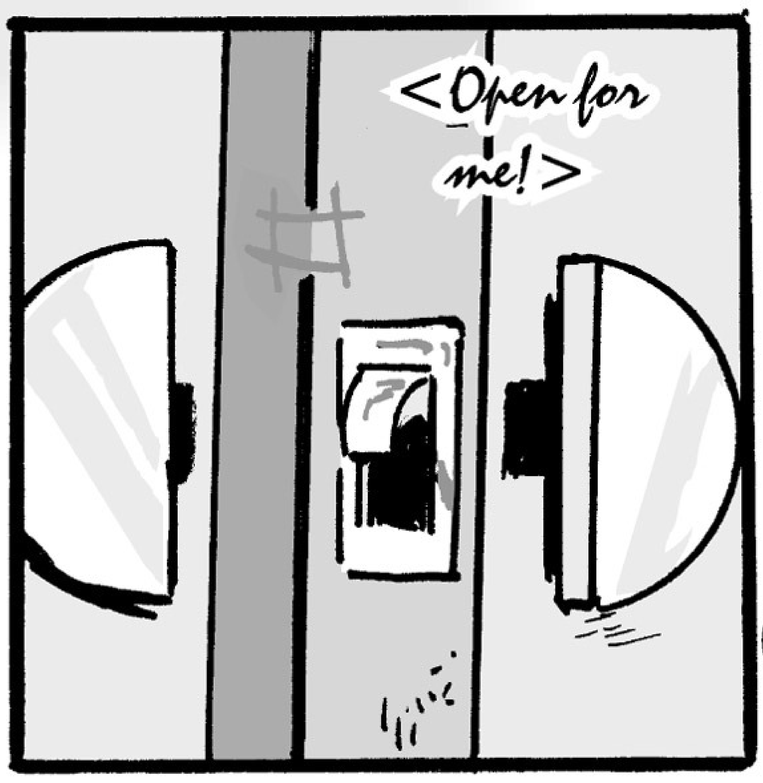

〈MAKE SURE THIS DOESN'T HAPPEN AGAIN!〉
〈I . . . IT WILL NOT . . .〉
〈. . . MY LORD.〉
〈COME. WE MUST LEAVE IMMEDIATELY.〉


〈TAHEE? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?〉
〈I'VE HAD WORSE.〉
〈I'M NOT A VERY GOOD HEALER, BUT I CAN TAKE THE STING OFF.〉
〈THANK YOU. THAT FEELS GOOD.〉


〈WE NEED TO GET MOVING.〉
〈RIGHT. LET'S START IN THE WORKSHOP.〉


〈HERE IT IS.〉


〈I am the Sorcerer Primus.〉


〈Open for me!〉

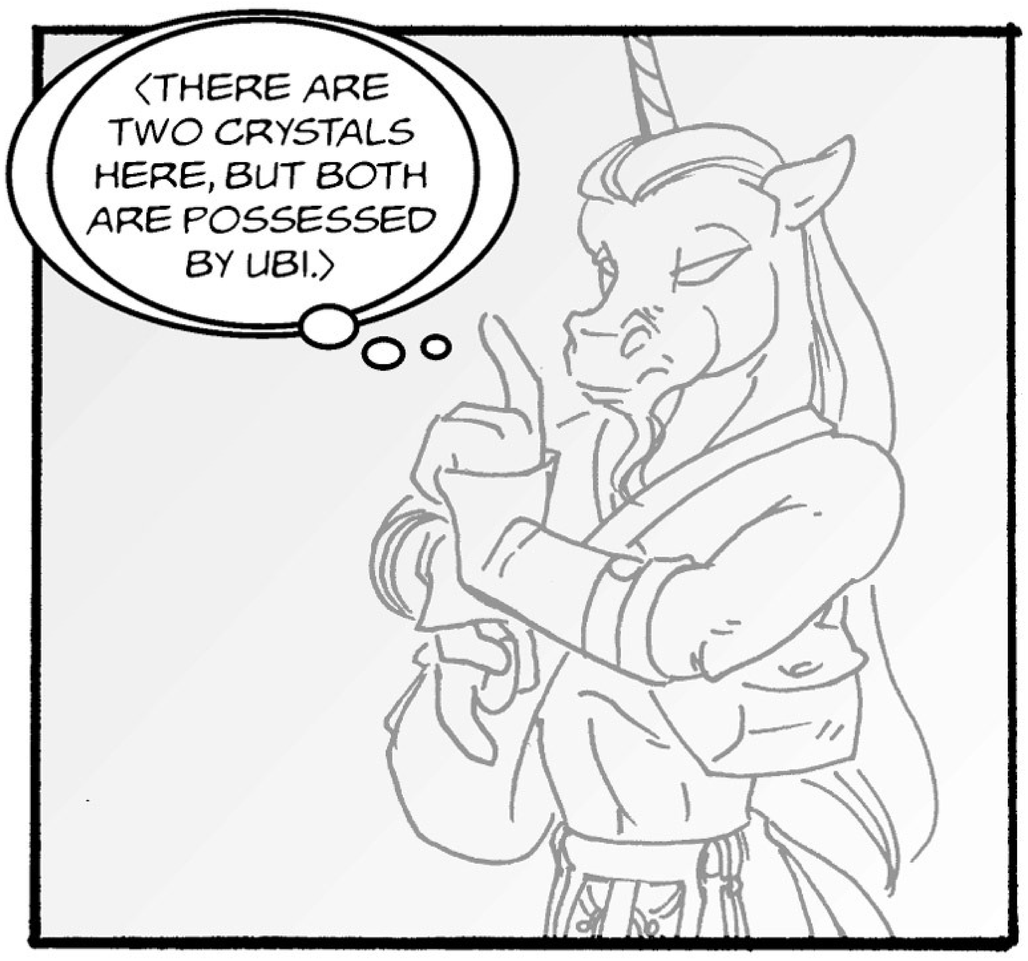

〈SEE IF YOU FIND ANY TRACES IN HERE.〉


〈WHAT IS THIS PLACE?〉
〈THIS IS THE MAIN MAGE'S WORKSHOP.〉
〈RIGHT NOW WE'RE CREATING SHIELD-BREAKER RUNES AND ETCHING THEM ON THE BULLETS THAT TARLOÖM CAME BACK WITH.〉


〈YOU ACTUALLY HAVE THE MANPOWER TO ASSEMBLY LINE THIS?〉


〈I'M IMPRESSED.〉
〈IT ISN'T AS IMPRESSIVE AS YOU THINK.〉


〈ALL OF THESE MAGES ARE UNSKILLED.〉
〈AND HALF ONLY KNOW THIS SPELL RUNE.〉


〈THERE ARE TWO CRYSTALS HERE, BUT BOTH ARE POSSESSED BY UBI.〉


〈FINE. LET'S MOVE TO THE ARMORY.〉


I NEED TO REQUISITION A WEAPON.〉
〈BE MY GUEST, SIR.〉
〈NOTHING HERE.〉


〈TREASURY NEXT?〉
〈POSSIBLY.〉
〈THOUGH I'M THINKING SHEILBA'S APARTMENTS WILL BE MORE LIKELY.〉
〈YOU HAVE A POINT.〉


〈THIS IS IT.〉
〈HE'S GOT THE ENTIRE WING TO HIMSELF?〉
〈HE IS THE LORD.〉
〈WELL, HERE GOES.〉
Sleep.
YAWN.

<IT'S CLEAR, TAHEE.>

<THEY'LL BE OUT FOR HOURS.>

<SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT THE MAGIC LOCK.>

<Open. . . .>

<ALL RIGHT.>

<LET'S GET INSIDE BEFORE SOMEONE STUMBLES ACROSS US.>

<RIGHT.>

<WAIT, DON'T TELL ME, LORD SHEILBA HAS A BIG THING FOR SNAKES....>

<AND YOU SAID THE LADY OF TIPPIKARRIE WAS WHACKED.>

<ALL THE FALSHI ARE "WHACKED". SHE'S JUST THE WORST OF THE LOT.>

<DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TRAPS ARE HERE.>

<RIGHT....>


〈GO TO THE PEDESTAL ON THE FAR WALL.〉
〈MOVE IT, BUT DON'T TOUCH IT.〉
〈PUT THAT DOWN SOMEWHERE CAREFULLY.〉
〈WHAT WE WANT IS UNDER HERE.〉
〈GOOD CALL. EXPLOSIVE RUNES. LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE TRIGGERED BY BODY HEAT.〉

<ANOTHER TRAP?>

<YES, AND NO. IT'S A RUNE SEAL. MUCH STRONGER THAN A MAGIC LOCK.>

<LOOKS LIKE IT'LL ONLY OPEN FOR THE OWNER.>

HUMM.

<TELL ME IF I'M MISTAKEN; THAT RUNE IS THE ONLY THING KEEPING THAT SEAL ON.>

<NO MORE RUNE, NO MORE SEAL.>

<CORRECT.>

FIZZZ

<WHAT DID YOU JUST DO?>

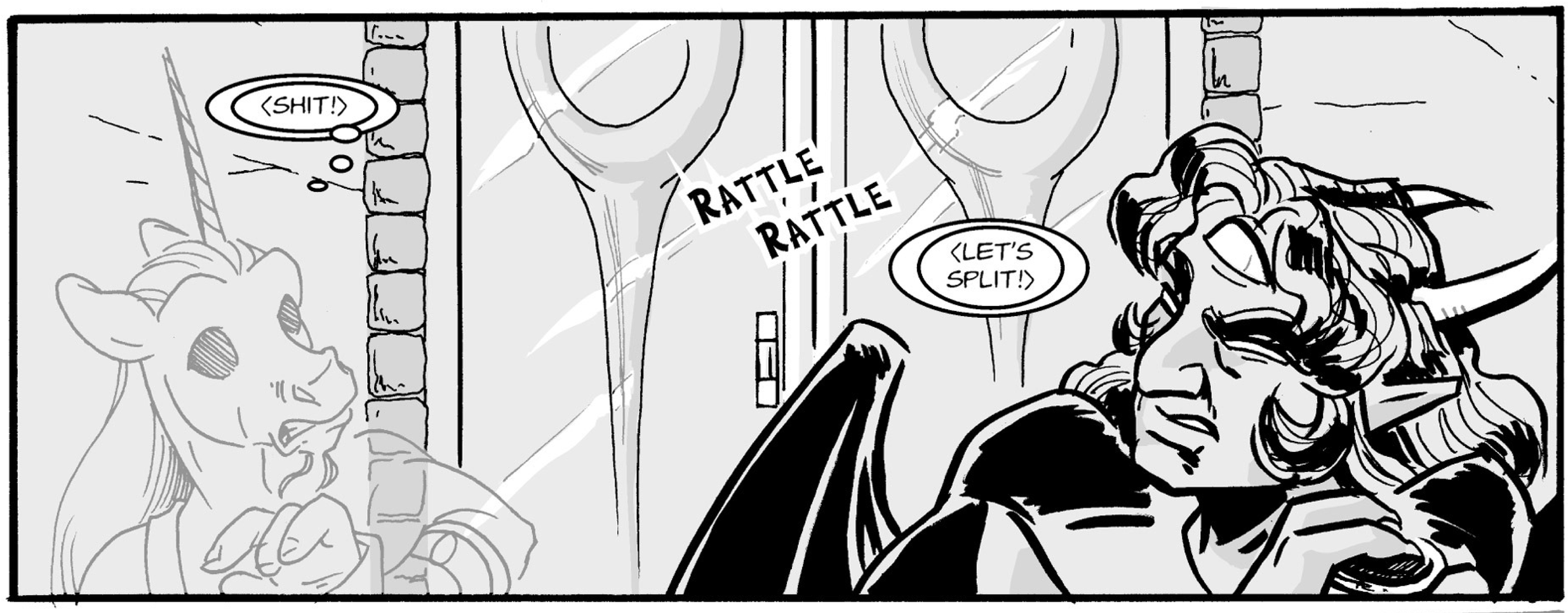
<MAGICALLY INCREASED THE OUTPUT AMPS.>

<HUH?>

FAA-ZAT!


〈NEVER MIND.〉


〈AND THERE'S OUR PRIZE.〉


〈SHIT!〉
RATTLE RATTLE
〈LET'S SPLIT!〉






Seal closed

WHAM!

<WHOEVER CAST THIS WAS A MASTER!>

<ENOUGH!>

<SOMEONE, GIVE ME YOUR GUN.>

BLAM!

(SEAL CLOSED)

TAHEE...

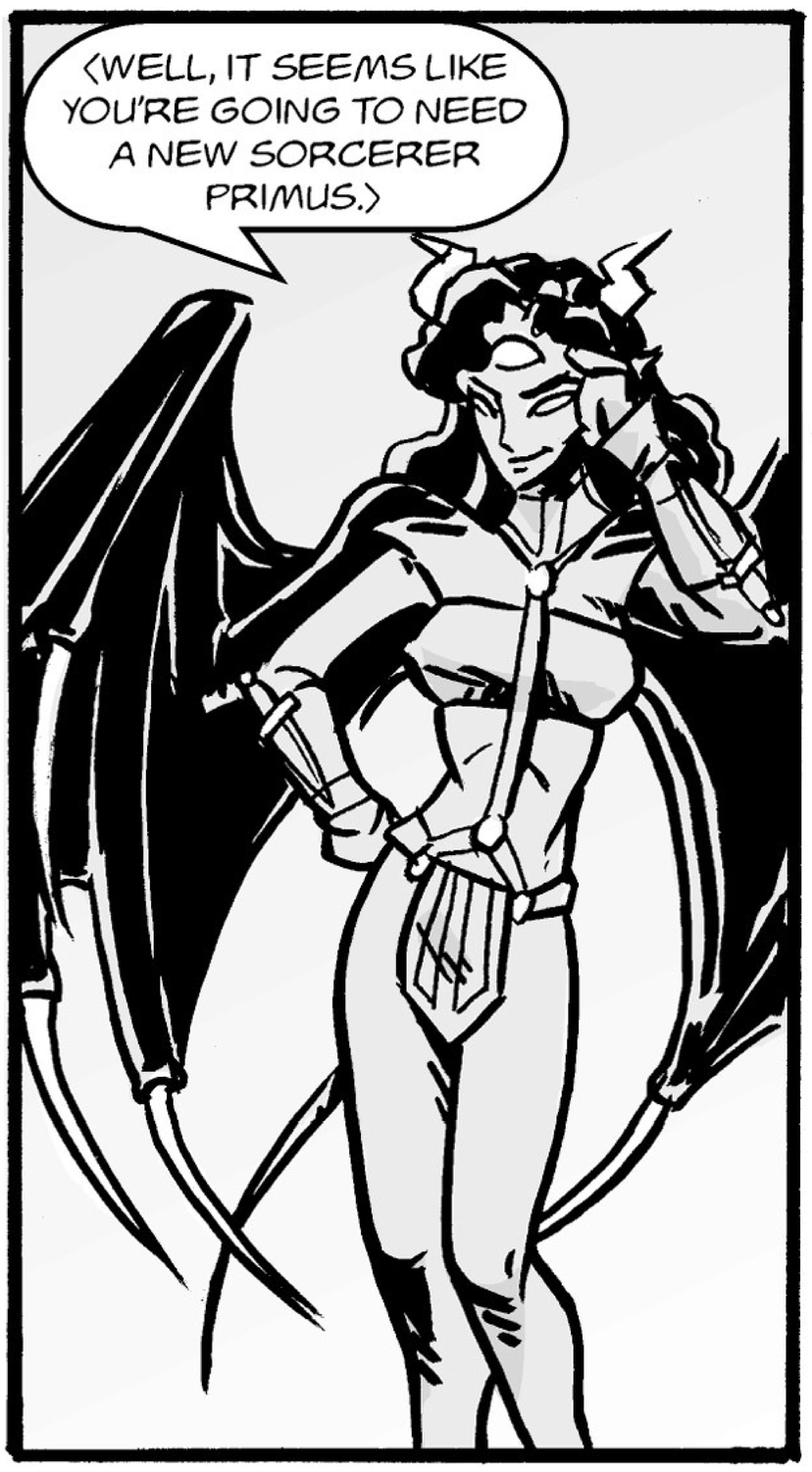

〈SHOOT HIM DOWN.〉


〈TAHEE! DODGE! NOW!〉


TA-CRACK!




〈SEND THE GUARD OUT TO COLLECT HIM.〉


〈WELL, IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'RE GOING TO NEED A NEW SORCERER PRIMUS.〉

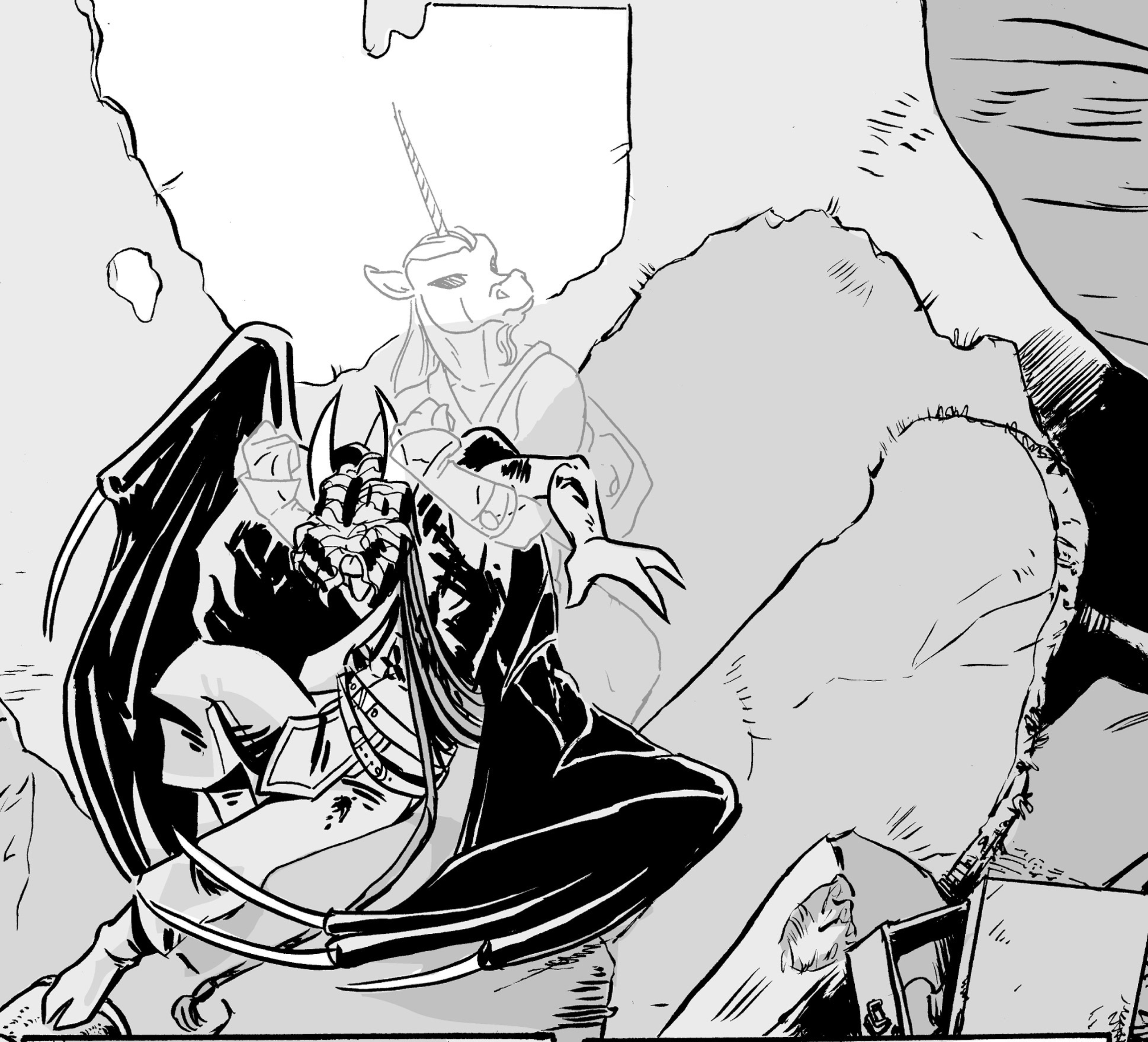

〈AND YOU FEEL YOURSELF QUALIFIED?〉
〈HAVE I NOT PROVEN MY USEFULNESS?〉


〈AND LOYALTY?〉


〈I SHALL THINK ON IT.〉


〈THERE ARE OTHER THINGS THAT CONCERN ME AT THE MOMENT.〉


〈THE FIRST OF WHICH IS DEALING WITH MY SON! IT'S TIME WE LEFT.〉




‹REST HERE, TAHEE.›
‹I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO FOR THE WING.›

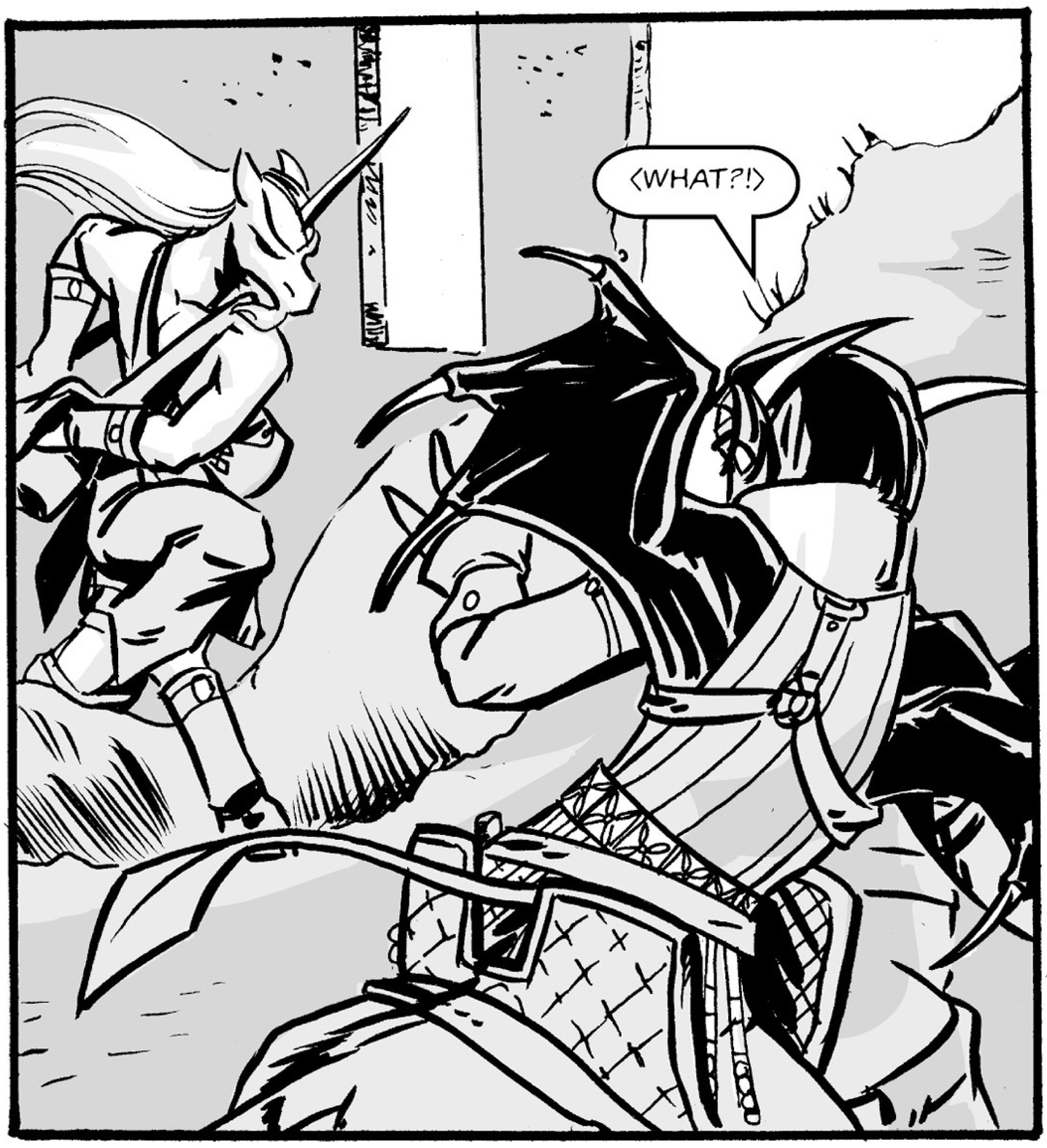

‹THE . . . THE GUARDS WILL COME . . .›
‹SHIT.›


‹THEY'RE HERE.›

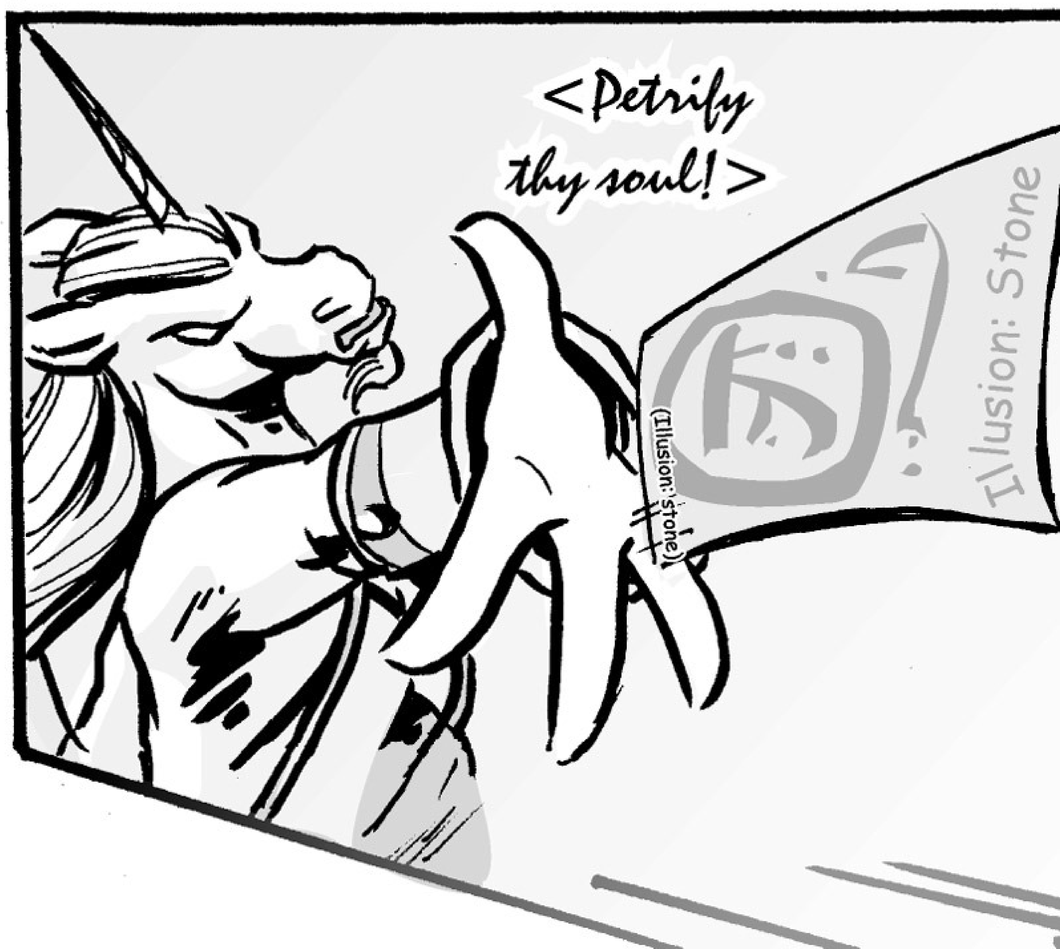

〈TAHEE! DROP MY INVISIBILITY.〉


〈BUT, IF THEY SEE YOU...〉


〈DO IT. NOW!〉


〈WHAT?!〉


〈HE SHOULD BE DEAD!〉


〈Petrify thy soul!〉
I\lusion: Stone
(Illusion: Stone)

THWAP!

Run!


〈THEY'RE GONE FOR NOW, TAHEE.〉
〈GOOD.〉


〈HOW ARE YOU DOING?〉
〈BARELY CONSCIOUS.〉


〈NO WONDER. YOU'VE LOST A LOT OF BLOOD.〉


〈I CAN'T BELIEVE I WAS *STUPID* ENOUGH TO THINK LORD SHEILBA WAS ALREADY GONE.〉
〈DOESN'T MATTER. WE'VE GOT WHAT WE CAME FOR. THAT'S ALL THAT COUNTS.〉

<WHERE ARE THEY?>

<THE BOYS SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE BY NOW.>

<WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENED?>

<YOU ARE A WORRY-WART, AREN'T YOU? THE BOYS ARE FINE.>

<IT HASN'T BEEN THAT LONG AFTER ALL.>

<I KNOW. BUT HOW CAN YOU BE SO SURE?>

<I HAVE FAITH IN MY LOVED ONE. DON'T YOU?>

<YES, BUT . . .>

<HEY! HOLLY! KÖRLORSHA!>

<IT'S THE GUYS!>

OH, THANK GOD.

<KÖRLORSHA! COULD YOU GIVE ME A HAND?>

<OH, NO! WHAT HAPPENED?>

<GIVE ME SOME PAIN HERBS AND I'LL BE FINE.>

<WE RAN INTO A SPOT OF TROUBLE.>

<STOW THE EGO, TAHEE. HYGRON YOU'RE NOT. YOU'VE LOST WAY TOO MUCH BLOOD.>

<IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO?>

<YES, IN MY BAG THERE'S A WHITE VIAL.>

<GOT IT.>

<THANKS.>

<BOTH OF YOU, LEAVE AND LET ME DO MY WORK.>

IS TAHEE GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT?

IF WE CAN GET HIM TO A HOSPITAL.

<HERE, DRINK THIS. IT WILL DEADEN THE PAIN.>

THE ORDER OF BUSINESS RIGHT NOW IS TO FIGURE OUT THESE THINGS.

I SUPPOSE.

≥HUM≤ MUCH DIFFERENT MAGIC COLLEGE THAN I'M USED TO.

JUST BE CAREFUL, AMARK. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT COULD UNLEASH.

<WHAT IS HE DOING?>

<I DON'T KNOW. NOW HOLD STILL.>

<OH, NO YOU DON'T.>


‹DROP THE SPELL.›
‹NOW!›
‹GIVE ME THE STONE.›
‹TAKE IT. IT'S YOURS.›
‹THOUGH, I DON'T SEE WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH HERE.›


〈I DON'T TRUST YOU, UNICORN.〉
〈I TURN MY BACK FOR A MOMENT, AND HERE YOU ARE TRYING TO LEAVE.〉


〈TAHEE, WE WEREN'T GOING ANYWHERE. AMARK WAS SIMPLY TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE STONE. NOTHING MORE.〉

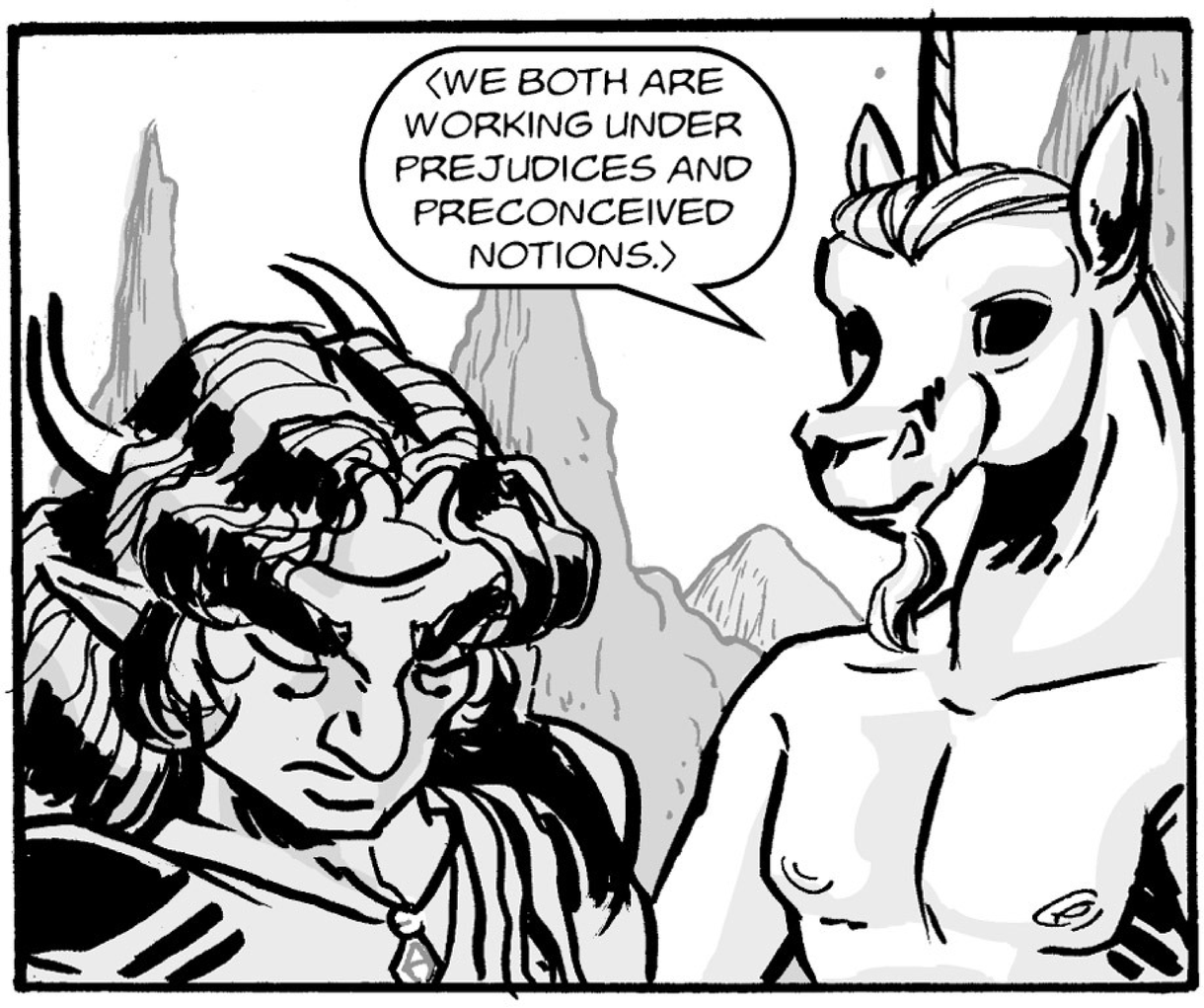

〈AND WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE... KÖRLORSHA?!〉
〈TAHEE, STOP IT!〉


〈HE'S HELPED US GET THIS FAR. AND THIS IS HOW YOU REPAY HIM?!〉
〈KÖRLORSHA! LOOK AT HIM.〉


〈DO YOU REALLY WANT TO TRUST A MONSTER?!〉
〈I'VE GIVEN MY WORD TO YOU AND HELD UP MY END OF THE BARGAIN.〉

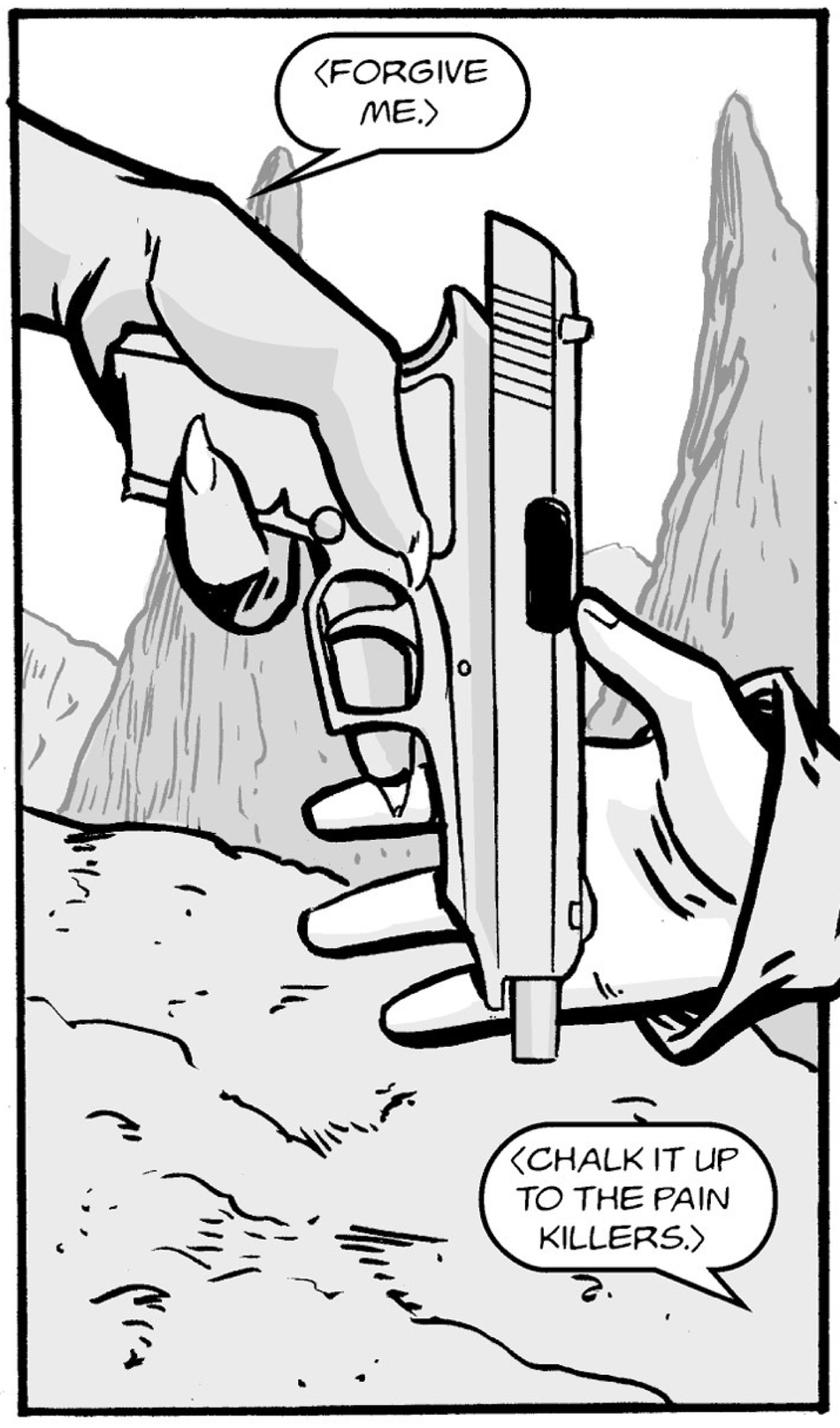

〈I DON'T TRUST YOU EITHER, TAHEE.〉


〈BUT THAT'S NOT A GOOD ENOUGH REASON TO GO BACK ON MY WORD.〉


〈WE BOTH ARE WORKING UNDER PREJUDICES AND PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS.〉


〈IT'S TIME WE PUT THEM ASIDE.〉


〈THAT IS IF WE BOTH WANT OUT OF YOUR LANDS AND INTO MINE.〉


〈FORGIVE ME.〉
〈CHALK IT UP TO THE PAIN KILLERS.〉

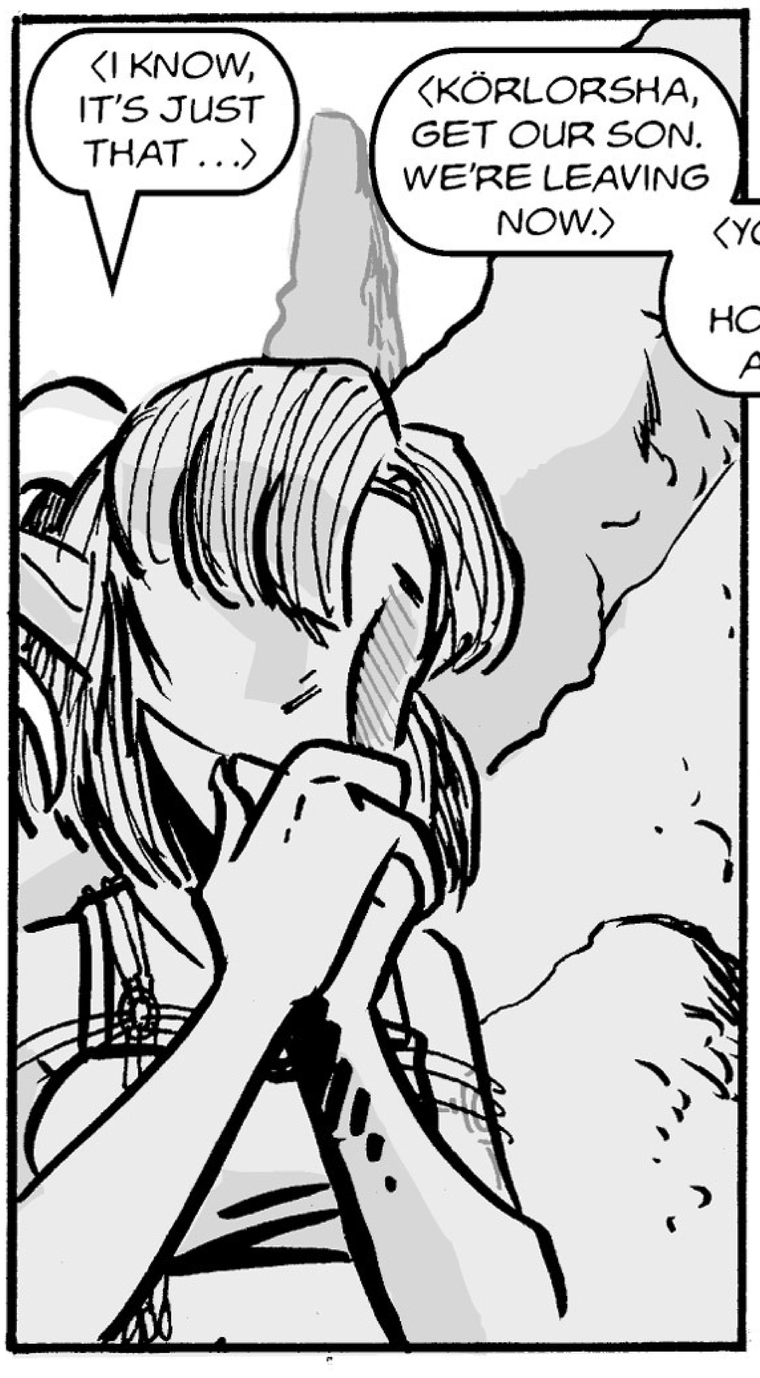

〈HERE IS THE RUNE CRYSTAL.〉
〈KEEP IT. I CAN'T USE IT.〉


〈WHAT?〉
〈THE CRYSTAL ITSELF IS A BLOOD KEY. UBI ONLY.〉


〈THAT WOULD EXPLAIN MUCH.〉
〈THINK YOU'RE UP TO ONE LAST SPELL?〉


〈OH, NO, YOU DON'T.〉
〈TAHEE'S NOT GOING ANYWHERE UNTIL I FINISH MENDING HIS WING.〉


〈KÖRLORSHA, I DON'T MEAN TO BELITTLE YOUR SKILLS AS AN HERBIST, BUT HE'D DO BETTER UNDER THE SKILLFUL HANDS OF A TRUE DOCTOR.〉


〈I KNOW, IT'S JUST THAT . . .〉
〈KÖRLORSHA, GET OUR SON. WE'RE LEAVING NOW.〉
〈YOU KNOW YOUR HOMELAND, AMARK.〉


〈SHOW ME THE WAY.〉

I DON'T KNOW ERMIN...

I'VE GONE OVER ALL THE RECORDS AND DRIVEN THRICE AROUND THE CITY.

EVERYTHING'S DRIED UP. I CAN'T FIND AMARK ANYWHERE.

I'M GOING HOME FOR THE NIGHT. NOTHING I CAN DO HERE.

IF SOMETHING COMES UP, GIVE ME A PAGE.

RIGHT.

WHAT THE...




FREEZE! BMI!


AMARK?

YOKO! PERFECT!

AH! SMELL THAT AIR! IT'S GOOD TO BE HOME!

WHAT'S GOING ON?

WE'VE GOT AN EMERGENCY ON OUR HANDS.

I'VE GOTTEN WIND THAT ONE OF THE MAJOR DEMON LORDS WE'VE BEEN FIGHTING AGAINST IS HERE ON NIVARRIA ATTEMPTING AN ASSASSINATION.

TAHEE AND KÖRLORSHA ARE WILLING TO TURN STATE'S WITNESS AGAINST HIM IN RETURN FOR OUR PROTECTION.

IF WE CAN NAIL HIM, WE CAN THROW THE BOOK AT HIM.

OH, HYGRON'S GOING TO BE PISSED HE MISSED THIS ONE.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, HOW IS HE?

HATING THE HOSPITAL FOOD AGAIN, BUT HE'LL BE FINE IN THE LONG RUN.

HOLLY, STAY HERE WITH TAHEE AND KÖRLORSHA. THEY'LL NEED A TRANSLATOR.

ERMIN! GET COGGS OUT HERE!

OH, NO! I'M COMING WITH YOU.

THIS IS NOW A POLICE OPERATION. YOU'D BE SAFER HERE.

AMARK! THAT CONCERT IS GOING TO BE CRAWLING WITH 'FRIENDLY' DEMONS. YOU'LL NEVER GET CLOSE TO THE BAND WITHOUT ME.

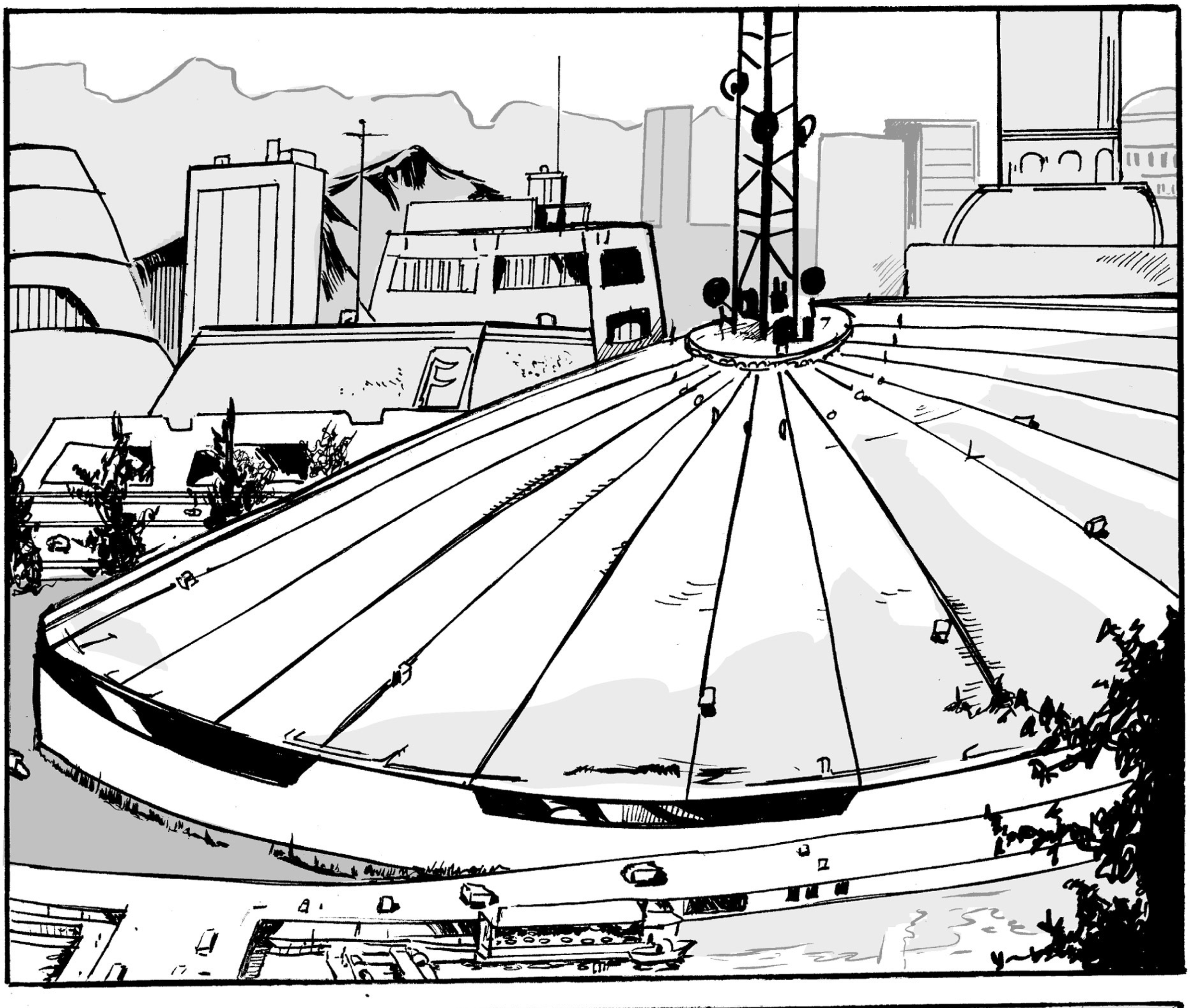
OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THAT YOU'RE THE BOOGEYMAN?

SMACK!

DAMN IT. WHY DO YOU HAVE TO BE RIGHT?

I JUST MISSED SOMETHING, DIDN'T I?

WE'LL EXPLAIN ON THE WAY.



〈HEY, SHARRDAN.〉
〈HELLO CALABAN.〉
〈WHAT'CHA DOING?〉

<OH, BECKY'S BEING A WORRY-WORT.>

<I KEEP TELLING HER NOTHING'S GOING TO HAPPEN, BUT YOU KNOW HOW SHE IS.>

<OH, YEAH.>

<THIS SHIELD CIRCLE SHOULD EASE HER MIND A BIT, THOUGH.>

<HERE'S HOPING.>

TO BE CONTINUED

The Northern Dolmanic Republic

By Smudge and Dave Bryant

When the Were Empire disintegrated four millennia ago, refugees flowed across the land. Some were ex-serfs wishing to build new homes; others were lycanthropes seeking new homes far from the ruins and the vengeance of their former thralls. One outmigration of the latter settled on rolling plains and a tribal life, and became known as the Northern Dolmen.

These Dolmanic tribes skirmished with the Hooven (minotaurs, centaurs, and fauns) that lived around their territories. As the centuries progressed and populations swelled, the fighting increased until it came to a head in a battle involving nearly all the tribes on both sides.

The chiefs of the Northern Dolmen gathered to choose a captain-general. Debate became argument, coming near to blows before the wiser heads among them pointed out that fighting could only weaken them on the very eve of battle. They called in an old, respected shaman, who advised them to play a pebble game; the winner would lead the united tribes on the morrow.

The Dolmen won the next day's battle—but they could only humble, not break, their opponents. The problem would rear its head again in another generation or two, and there were intertribal concerns as well. What began as an ad hoc expedient was institutionalized, though selecting a new high chief became more formalized.

When the Hooven tribes came again, the Dolmen were as ready as their grandfathers could make them. Again they defeated their attackers, soundly but at great cost. There were the inevitable calls to destroy the Hooven, but the Dolmen did not have the strength for a pogrom. Even if they did, the survivors would become an endless thorn in the Dolmen's collective foot.

A more practical solution emerged. The conquered tribes were annexed and promised that, with hard work and cooperation, they too could eventually enjoy equal status in the eyes of the (newly elevated) king. This cut off potential resentment, leaving the equally inevitable soreheads among the vanquished with little support. It was both visionary and pragmatic, and became the foundation for the growing realm's policies for centuries to come.

The Northern Dolmanic Kingdom expanded, sometimes through diplomacy or inheritance, often by the sword. (Shammark County was one such conquest.) It remained faithful to its promises, and while it never lacked for unrest, its stability was never seriously threatened. It became a powerful feudal state and remained thus until the Great Awakening a few centuries ago.

Checks and balances had grown up between the crown and the Great House, a parliament of the titled nobility or their proxies. It was there that petitions were usually heard, traditionally through the lord to whom the petitioner looked, though the right of personal appearance existed. The rise of a vigorous mercantile class signalled a departure; petitioners of this ambitious group began to appear personally in the Great House. The guilds followed suit, and it was not long before professional respresentatives spoke for their constituencies before the Great House. These "men of the people" evolved into the Petitioners House, a second legislative body.

Its strongest power is that of the purse; the rationale was that merchants and guildsmen paid the bulk of crown taxes, so they should decide how that money was spent. In general the Petitioners House tends to promote business and industry. The guilds and unions represent labor, but more in the abstract than in the concrete. Oddly enough, it is the Great House that better represents the "man on the street", for the ancient bonds of noblesse oblige still linger.

By the dawn of the Industrial Age, the king had become little more than head of state, and a national plebiscite made that state the Northern Dolmanic Republic, with a new constitution. Even so, the peerage and the crown remain, the latter with few powers but important ones, such as opening and closing the Great House and calling for new elections to the Petitioners House.

Today, the NDR is still a strong, vital country of more than sixty million. While not without its faults, it enjoys an international reputation as a voice of reason and a respectable military power.




TRACY REYNOLDS '02